

A mountain gorilla strikes a thoughtful pose in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park.





Kigali

Modern Rwanda Reflects a Calm
and Pleasant Beauty

By Brian George



Looking down meticulously swept streets, lined with trees and flowering tropical plants, it can be difficult to reconcile the calm beauty of Kigali with the chaos and destruction the city witnessed during the 100 days of Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

People have used many phrases, such as "Rwanda rising" or "Rwanda reborn," to describe one of the most dynamic countries in the region and one that has taken great strides toward overcoming the legacy of the genocide. As Rwanda's largest bilateral donor, the U.S. government is an active partner in the rebuilding process, making this an exciting time to serve at the U.S. Embassy in Kigali.

Though Rwanda is just south of the equator, its average altitude of 5,000 feet keeps temperatures mild throughout the year. The average 24-hour temperature in Kigali is a comfortable 73 degrees.

in the Mist

Known as the land of a thousand hills, Rwanda features low mountains that give way in the east to the savannah of Akagera National Park and in the west to the jagged peaks of Volcanoes National Park, home to the world's largest population of mountain gorillas made famous through the research of Dian Fossey.

Thanks to concerted efforts to eliminate poaching and provide a safe and secure tourism experience, more than 12,000 tourists

visited the gorillas last year, with Americans by far the largest group.

Other tourism attractions and popular weekend destinations for mission staff include Gisenyi and Kibuye, resort towns on Lake Kivu that enjoy spectacular vistas of the lake and surrounding hills, and Akagera National Park, a game reserve that is home to a wide range of savannah animals, including elephants, giraffes, zebras, hippos and a number of antelope species.

A recent addition to Rwanda's tourism trail is the Nyungwe Forest, where visitors can encounter more than 75 mammal species, including chimpanzees and rare colobus monkeys. Devel-



Above: A scenic view of Lake Kivu from Kibuye. Right: Former self-help program coordinator Victoria Golbus visits school children who benefit from the program.

PHOTOGRAPHS: U.S. EMBASSY IN KIGALI

opment of the forest as a sustainable tourism site is being aided through a U.S. Agency for International Development-supported biodiversity project.

Weekends in Kigali center on tennis, golf and other sporting activities; restaurant outings; and the occasional cultural event. New restaurants continue to sprout up, including Kigali's first western-style coffee shop, complete with wireless Internet access. Plans are afoot for a number of entertainment venues.

Construction has reached an advanced stage on a new embassy compound scheduled to open next January. The compound, which is to house all mission elements, will markedly improve working conditions, accelerate the integration of foreign assistance operations and more accurately reflect the growing U.S.-Rwanda bilateral relationship.

With more than 40 direct-hire Americans from State, the Department of Defense, USAID and the Centers for Disease Control, along with a Marine Security Guard detachment, the mission has grown rapidly in the past five years.

Focus Country

Foreign assistance programs are likely to total more than \$150 million in 2007. Rwanda is a focus country for both the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and his Malaria Initiative, making health programs the largest single element of U.S. government assistance. CDC, DOD and USAID all are actively involved in implementing the PEPFAR program, while CDC and USAID are working to rapidly scale up the malaria program.

In addition to its work with the Rwandan Defense Forces to combat HIV/AIDS in the military, DOD funds a number of humanitarian assistance projects and has facilitated the participation of Rwandan troops in the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Darfur, Sudan. Through the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program, the U.S. provides critical assistance to Rwandan battalions before their deployment to Darfur.

Despite its successes, Rwanda is challenged by being a land-locked country with a small market and few natural resources. It faces major obstacles in

AT A GLANCE: RWANDA



Capital
Kigali

Total area
26,338 square kilometers

Approximate size
Slightly smaller than Maryland

Government
Republic

Independence
July 1, 1962 (from a Belgium-administered UN trusteeship)

Population
9.9 million

Ethnic groups
Hutu (Bantu), Tutsi (Hamitic) and Twa (Pygmy)

Languages
Kinyarwanda, French, English and Kiswahili

Currency
Rwandan franc (RWF)

Per capita income
\$1,600

Population below poverty line
60 percent

Import commodities
Food, machinery and steel

Import partners
Kenya (18.9 percent), Uganda (6.6 percent) and Belgium (5.8 percent)

Export commodities
Coffee, tea and hides

Export partners
Germany (11 percent), China (6.5 percent) and Belgium (4.5 percent)

Internet country code
.rw

SOURCE: CIA World Factbook 2007

attracting direct foreign investment, and its per capita gross domestic product of \$230 marks it as one of the poorest countries in the world.

While school enrollment and literacy rates are climbing quickly, the country continues to suffer from the loss of a large percentage of its educated class during the genocide, and skilled labor is in short supply. The weak economic infrastructure presents both professional and personal challenges for mission staff.

Overcoming Barriers

The mission is helping Rwanda overcome some of the barriers to economic development. Most notably, with USAID assistance Rwanda has moved from producing no specialty coffee to being recognized by Starbucks, Intelligentsia Coffee, Green Mountain Coffee and others as a source of some of the highest-quality coffee in the world. More important, this new market is providing additional income for thousands of farmers.

In 2006 the United States and Rwanda signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement that provides a platform for expanded cooperation on economic issues. The Ambassador's Self-Help Fund directly supports community-based, income-generating projects and also provides an opportunity for the mission staff who serve as project sponsors to get to know ordinary Rwandans and the conditions in which they live.

Critical to Rwanda's long-term development is peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. While no longer a threat to Rwanda's national security, the presence of rebel groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to be a drag on economic development and regional integration.

As the facilitator of the Tripartite Plus mechanism—which provides a forum for the governments of Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda and



Above: Traditional dancers perform for visiting embassy officials. Below left: Former assistant regional security officer Matthew Golbus, middle, and USAID program officer Christophe Tocco, right, set forth on Lake Kivu with a friend at the helm. Right: Mist rises over an extinct volcano in Volcanoes National Park.



PHOTOGRAPHS: (TOP): U.S. EMBASSY IN KIGALI; (BOTTOM LEFT): VICTORIA GOLBUS; (RIGHT): BRIAN GEORGE; (OPPOSITE PAGE TOP): U.S. EMBASSY IN KIGALI; (BOTTOM LEFT): VICTORIA GOLBUS; (RIGHT): BRIAN GEORGE



Top: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Thurston joins a community group celebrating its embassy support. Left: The embassy soccer team winds down after a match. Above: A mountain gorilla relaxes.

A CDC community health worker counsels a client at a PEPFAR-sponsored HIV/AIDS voluntary counseling and testing site. Below: Assistant general services officer Andres Valdes, second from left, and Major Danny Huynh, far right, take a dugout canoe ride with friends on Lake Muhazi.



Fishermen on Lake Kivu. Below: Embassy staff and friends enjoy a barbecue at the embassy's property on Lake Muhazi.



Uganda—the U.S. government has successfully promoted the peaceful resolution of contentious issues and is helping participant countries develop a common strategy for dealing with negative forces in the region.

In 2006, Rwanda became eligible for the Millennium Challenge Corporation's threshold program, which opens opportunities for the United States to expand its already substantial engagement on democracy and governance issues.

While the challenges are great, the signs of progress are clear. The government's emphasis on providing a safe, clean, corruption-free environment has not escaped the world's attention. That, coupled with natural beauty and an excellent climate, is making Rwanda a destination of choice for a growing number of tourists and resident expatriates. ■

The author is the public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Kigali.